

# Litta

AN AMERICAN SINGER

---

MARIE EUGENIA VON ELSNER



10 —  
CCIB  
365



Digitized by the Internet Archive  
in 2007 with funding from  
Microsoft Corporation











LITTA  
An American Singer

A SKETCH OF  
MARIE EUGENIA VON ELSNER

BY  
JOHN M. SCOTT

---

BLOOMINGTON, ILLINOIS  
1897

RH.

Copyright by  
JOHN M. SCOTT.  
1897.

MARIE EUGENIA VON ELSNER.



**DEDICATED**  
TO THE MEMORY OF  
**HUGO VON ELSNER**  
AND  
**AMANDA KATHARINE VON ELSNER,**  
FATHER AND MOTHER OF LITTA,  
SO THAT THEIR NAMES MAY EVER  
BE CLOSELY ASSOCIATED WITH  
THE NAME AND FAME  
OF THEIR GIFTED  
DAUGHTER.

## CONTENTS.

---

I. THE VON ELSNER FAMILY, -	13
II. A PUPIL OF HER FATHER,	41
III. A QUEEN OF SONG, - - -	57
IV. A SWEET VOICE, - - -	81
V. WITH THE STRAKOSCH OPERA COMPANY, - - -	99
VI. CONCERT TOURS, - - -	125
VII. THE GOING HOME, - -	145
VIII. PERSONAL WORTH, - - -	153
IX. IN MEMORIAM, - - -	163

## ILLUSTRATIONS.

---

I. LITTA. Frontis-piece, - - -	1
In Marriage Scene in Lucia.	
II. LITTA, - - - - -	65
A Student in Paris.	
III. COTTAGE, - - - - -	83
Presented to Litta's Mother.	
IV. LITTA MONUMENT, - - - -	164
In Bloomington Cemetery.	





## NOTE.

**O**BVIOUSLY the biography of a person whose life is in no way connected with public affairs is brief. That which is achieved by a single individual, disconnected from others, is an inconsiderable portion of history. It is only when one's life becomes interwoven with the events of a nation or people, his biography widens and presents an extensive field for investigation. Matters of national or popular concern are then considered in connection with the individual acts of the person whose biography is to be written. It is a noticeable fact, the life of a great artist in music or painting seldom furnishes more than limited material for biography. That is especially true of a prima donna, however famous she may become

## LITTA

during the time she is before the public. Two explanations may be given: 1. Hers is mostly individual work. She labors in a realm above all others—alone; and 2. The life of a great prima donna on the lyric stage is not often longer than a short series of years. Of the personal history of such an one before her *debut*, little is ever known—only that it had been a time of severest toil and training to fit her for her profession. Her coming before the public is not always anticipated and is sometimes as unexpected as is the coming of a meteor that lights up the heavens for a brief moment with such fascinating splendor. But suddenly as a prima donna comes into public view just as suddenly she disappears. After a few years of brilliant appearing she leaves the stage and if not wholly forgotten, it is certain but little is heard of her by the general public in all the fu-

## NOTE

ture. Only a few in the same profession will long remember her. These considerations afford an explanation of the brevity of this sketch of Marie Eugenia von Elsner, or Litta, as she was best known. Her life was only a short span—twenty-seven years. Most of those years were spent in the study of her chosen profession. After her first great success in Paris she was not before the public much longer than five years. Then for the first time, since her earliest childhood, she had rest—peaceful rest—but it was in the silent grave. Writing only of her the story of her life is shortly told. It has been very difficult to secure the facts necessary to enable one to write a full sketch of the life of Litta, and there has been in many instances no opportunity to verify such as have been obtained, so as to be absolutely certain of their correctness. It is for that rea-

## LITTA

son it is feared errors have got into this little work. It was the intention to treat everyone, especially those whose names have been mentioned, with the utmost fairness, and if that has not been done it will be a matter of profound regret. Indebtedness for much this sketch contains is acknowledged as being due to Capt. and Mrs. J. H. Burnham.

I.

THE VON ELSNER FAMILY

“We spend our years as a tale that is told.”

---

“History makes haste to record great deeds, but often neglects good ones.”

—*Hosea Ballou.*

## THE VON ELSNERS.

THE biography of noted persons, especially that portion which relates to their early and personal lives, is a valuable part of the local history of the community in which they lived. Indeed, the biography of all people, whether lowly or exalted, constitutes no inconsiderable portion of the history of the state or nation. It is worth vastly more than accounts of its wars—its battles with tables of its dead. The one relates to war—war is simply violence—and teaches no lesson that is gentle and refined—the other relates to and teaches all that is good and true in the best lives. That is what young people need most to learn and know. There are in every com-

## LITTA

munity, whether new or old, persons whose lives furnish material for biography in its best and truest sense. Persons who have become known to fame and who have risen to exalted positions in statesmanship and literature, in art, in music, in mechanics, and in the learned professions, have established characters eminently fit to be made the subject of study. There are persons—and very many of them—in lowly life who never become known much beyond the limits of the neighborhood in which they lived, and yet whose lives are crowded full of all that is good and heroic—the study of which is always interesting and profitable. It is of such we wish to know most. When the crown of greatest excellence shall be placed on the head most worthy to wear it, at the last



## THE VON ELSNERS

grand assizes by the Great Judge of all the earth, it is not probable it will rest upon the head of one written by the historian as greatest among the great ones of this world. It may be it will rest upon one who was esteemed lowly as men write history, and yet whose life was truth itself and whose deeds were all gentleness and kindness.

It is the purpose now to write of one of whom the historian of her state will not do much more than make brief mention of her name, the dates of her birth and death; and yet her name and personal worth are worthy of a record written where it will endure forever. Influences that came from her true and gentle life will impress the communities among whom she lived long after there will remain any one who will mention her name. With the

## LITTA

present generation the name of Litta is imperishable, but to make it perpetual with succeeding generations it must have historic mention. That part of the biography of famous people that is usually of greatest interest relates commonly to their early lives. The desire is to know the beginnings of their lives and to trace their progress onward and upward to greatness. It is the highway to fame and most every one is intensely interested in its description; or, as the woodman expresses it, in having it "blazed," so that others may readily discover and follow it.

The subject of this brief sketch,—Marie Eugenia von Elsner,—came from forbears on her mother's side neither rich nor poor. Her mother was the daughter of William Dimmitt and Mary

## THE VON ELSNERS

Irvine Dimmitt. Her grandfather, — William Dimmitt—was a pioneer in Illinois. His birthplace was in the state of Maryland. In 1825 he came West. Afterwards, he purchased a small farm near the north side of Blooming Grove, in McLean county, consisting, perhaps, of eighty acres, which he improved, and on which he afterwards made a home for his family, and on a part of which he lived with his family until his death, which occurred in 1879. It was an excellent selection for a home in the midst of a new and beautiful country. What is now the city of Bloomington had not then been located. Later, the town of Bloomington was surveyed and located on land just west—perhaps not adjoining—but not far distant from Mr. Dimmitt's land. The little town pros-

## LITTA

pered and extended east, so that it soon became necessary for him to lay off part of his farm in an addition to the town of Bloomington, which addition bears his name to this day; and, finally, his whole farm was needed for town lots. From the sale of lots, he realized what was considered quite a little fortune in that early day. Before his death much of it was lost, so that no considerable portion of it descended to his children. His daughter, Amanda, was born in Bloomington in 1835. She was the mother of Marie Eugenia von Elsner, — since better known by her stage name of Litta.

Not much is known concerning the paternal ancestors of the subject of this sketch — Marie Eugenia. They were Germans, and probably were of high rank in their native land. It is

## THE VON ELSNERS

not known that any of the family, other than her father, ever came to America. Her father—Hugo von Elsner—was born near Goerletz, not far from Dresden, in Germany. Not much explanation is given by English lexicographers of the word “von” or of its origin, or concerning its exact meaning when used in connection with a person’s name. The word itself is German, and is a preposition meaning “from” or “of.” It is a twin word with “van”—\*Dutch—which is defined to

---

\*Originally the word “von”—and may be it does now in Germany—indicated, the person before whose name it was used was entitled to some rank or distinction, but perhaps it did not of itself imply the rank to which the party was entitled. It seems that afterwards the descendant families still used the word without reference to the fact whether the descendants would or might come to the same offices or rank. Persons who could rightfully use the word in Germany still use it after coming to this country, where it can not mean much if anything, under American customs and usages.

## LITTA

mean "before." The word was used by her father, certainly since the time he came to this country, and doubtless before he came from Germany. Whatever "von" did or may mean in Germany, in this country, with American people, it means no more than "van," and that has come to be so generally used it is not understood by common folk to mean anything more than a part of a person's name itself.

It matters little what meaning may be attached to the word "von," it is certain he was a man of more than ordinary intellectual endowments. He was highly educated in the German schools before coming to America. It is said he was a lieutenant in the "Jaeger Battalion"—a military organization in Germany noted for the fact it was composed of educated young men

## THE VON ELSNERS

of prominence. It was known he was a civil engineer, and doubtless practiced that profession to a limited extent before leaving his native land. He could not have practiced that or any other occupation very long in Germany, for he was a very young man when he came to this country. He never returned to his fatherland. After coming to Illinois he followed for a brief time the occupation of a civil engineer. In that capacity, or in some other, he assisted others in the construction of a railway between Elgin and Freeport.

It was in 1854 he came to Bloomington to make for himself a new home, and to cast in his lot with its people. It was around his new location most of the events of his after-life clustered—events that will give him a place in

## LITTA

history that he might not otherwise have had. It is not known he ever followed or sought employment in the occupation of a civil engineer after coming to Bloomington. He had a passion for teaching music and it was well for him that he had, for he did not seem to have any capacity for doing much else from which any income could be derived. However, he did couple with the teaching of music the teaching of the German language to a limited extent. In the teaching of the German language, he did not seem to take much interest, and perhaps was not very successful — it may have been because he could not get much to do in that line. But in the teaching of music he was quite successful, and it was from that source that he derived the principal part of his income — a revenue not



## THE VON ELSNERS

large at any time. Some classes were organized for the study of the German language and engaged him for their teacher. In one of his classes organized to study that language was Gen. William Ward Orme, who afterwards became a distinguished lawyer and was noted as an orator. During the Civil war of 1861-1865, he enlisted in the Federal army, was colonel of the ninety-fourth regiment of Illinois Volunteers, and, later was appointed by the President a brigadier general in the army, which appointment was confirmed by Congress. He won high distinction in that service as a brave and gallant officer. Another member of the same class was Dr. William A. Elder, who later became eminent as a physician, and was also noted for his skill as a surgeon. He was esteemed as a man of

## LITTA

the highest social worth. The writer of this sketch of the teacher's gifted and famous daughter was also a member of the same class. Only General Orme made a success of learning the German language under his instruction. He acquired such knowledge of that language as enabled him to speak it quite fluently. It was not the fault of the teacher, other members of the class whose names have been mentioned did not become more proficient in that language.

Before and at the date and for a brief time after his marriage, von Elsner had desk room in the law office of the writer. That fact afforded an opportunity to become personally well acquainted with him—that is as well as he would permit any one outside of his family to become acquainted with him.

## THE VON ELSNERS

In many respects he was very singular in his distinguishing characteristics. He was not always equable in his temperament. At times he was cheerful, and at others despondent as though suffering from disappointment. The recollection of him is that in his disposition he was generally reticent. The class in German, of which mention has been made, met in the office of the writer for the purpose of receiving instruction. It was seldom—if ever—he stopped after the hour for giving the lesson had expired to talk with any member of the class, either on such subjects as usually engage the attention of young men of near the same age or about anything else. General Orme was a brilliant and entertaining conversationalist, and yet it is not believed von Elsner ever talked with him

## LITTA

five minutes at any one time about anything other than the lesson he was teaching. The agreement was, he was to teach the class for a definite time — perhaps one hour each lesson — for a stipulated sum to be paid by each member of the class. On entering the room where the class was usually assembled before his coming, without saying more than the usual friendly greeting — and that briefly — he commenced his teaching, and at the close he asked for and received the tuition due from each scholar and at once left with as brief ceremony as he had entered the office. It may be he was more social in other company — whether he was or not, no information can now be given. He seemed to commune mostly with himself. Oftentimes he appeared to be abstracted — his at-

## THE VON ELSNERS

tention seemingly engaged in matters elsewhere than in the midst of his immediate surroundings. That gave persons who did not know him well the impression, he was abrupt and austere in his manners. Such, however, was not the fact. In some respects he was a genius and possessed what may be termed a German metaphysical mind. It was comprehensive, dreamy, and thoughtful. He did not possess much executive ability and still less capacity for money making in any business. It seemed to be impossible for him to organize a business that would produce any profitable returns. He could do so much work for so much money, and that was all. One who knew him and his wife well, is authority for the statement, it was seldom two persons whose lives came together ever possessed so

## LITTA

little capacity for taking care of or providing for themselves.

Of his wife not much can be written. She was the daughter of pioneers—a hardy and vigorous people. Her lot having been cast among a pioneer people it was not practicable for her to have much advantage from the schools—the best of them being at that early day of rather low grade—but she possessed strong sense and distinctly marked mental characteristics. One of her sons now living says his mother had an unusually sweet voice and of considerable power and compass. Litta herself said her mother possessed a beautiful voice but it was never cultivated. Their daughter—Marie—doubtless took her distinguishing characteristics from both her father and mother. She had the genius and men-

## THE VON ELSNERS

tal endowments of her father and no doubt she obtained from her mother that wonderful voice power that made her known in her own and other lands. Although an educated musician, her father was in no considerable degree the master of song.

It is strange what a fascination the events in the early life of one who has become famous have for all readers, both young and old, learned and unlearned, who make their lives the subject of study. No branch of literature has more in it that charms — especially young persons — than books of biography in which are recorded the early events in a great life. The nineteenth century abounds in such works and they take rank as the most popular books of the current period. It is for the simple reason in them is traced the

## LITTA

events that make up great characters from early childhood to strong manhood in the progress from "obscurity to fame"—a fame as wide as civilization prevails on all the earth. The life of her who is the subject of this sketch may never be written by the historian of states and commonwealths as one who was accounted great in the age in which she lived, and yet her life had in it as much that was heroic, brave, and worthy to be recorded as was ever contained in the life of the mere soldier who led armies to devastate and lay waste states and provinces. Few characters show better than does hers the struggle from lowly life to a splendid triumph that brought her a success that very few achieve. By the strength of her own indomitable energy, she rose, from obscurity and



## THE VON ELSNERS

poverty, to a position the most gifted queen of song might envy.

It is a strange fact she never had any childhood life as other little ones have. From the cradle to the grave her life was a ceaseless but heroic struggle such as few could endure. Like the huma, she never stopped to rest. Our admiration for her is increased as we read the history of her life work from its beginning to its close. Not any event occurred in her life but that teaches some valuable lesson, we would all be the better for knowing. Let us go with her through her short but brilliant life and we shall see where she was born, how she lived, what work she did, what burdens she bore, what hardships she suffered through long, weary days and cheerless nights, until the light of the morn-

## LITTA

ing of her triumph gilded her beautiful life. If anyone would be great, go travel the path she trod, work as she wrought, struggle as she struggled, sometimes in hope but more often in deepest sorrow but with a faith in her ultimate success that was sublime and unfaltering, and his ambition may be crowned with success.

Marie Eugenia von Elsner was born June 1, 1856, in a small cottage situated on the north side of Front street, east, now known as No. 710, between Clayton and Clinton streets, in the city of Bloomington. She died July 7, 1883, at No. 812 Washington street, east, not much more distant than the usual sized block from the place of her birth. Her life was brief—only a span of twenty-seven years—if measured by the calendar, but if measured by its

## THE VON ELSNERS

achievements it would seem to have been one of unusual duration. The calendar only indicates the length of lives not great in results. Great lives are often crowded into few years.

It was a matter of profound regret, not only with Marie herself but with many friends, that her father died before his cherished daughter, in whom he had such interest and pride, and of whom he expected so much, had achieved her triumphant success. But her mother lived until after her daughter became famous in song, her death not occurring until since that of her daughter. Surviving Marie, were her brothers and sisters, viz: Don von Elsner, Byron von Elsner, Emma von Elsner, and Jessie von Elsner. Bayard von Elsner died at the age of ten years. That was the first death in the

## LITTA

family. Since then Don von Elsner died in Bloomington, the city of his birth. Of splendid physique, he was a fine appearing and manly young man. Like other members of his family he was a musician of rather unusual attainments. The cornet was his favorite instrument and when he chose to play, as he often did, he was heard with much pleasure and interest. His early death was much regretted. Byron von Elsner was until recently living in Chicago and perhaps devotes more of his time to business than to music. Emma von Elsner is also now a resident of Chicago. She is gifted with a good degree of musical talent and is now, or was, engaged with the Metropolitan Conservatory of Music in that city. She is said to have a fine voice. It is a matter of much gratification

## THE VON ELSNERS

to the friends of her distinguished sister that Miss Emma gives promise of being able to achieve success in her chosen profession. The other surviving sister is Jessie von Elsner. It was the expectation of her friends, she might become quite noted in song, but neither her voice nor her musical talents have been fully developed, so it can not yet be known what measure of success she may achieve. She is at present a resident of Brussels. All of the brothers and sisters possessed endowments of no mean capacity, that make them a rather noted family.

In the family, when the children were all young, Litta's name was Marie, but was pronounced as though written Maria. Her school advantages were limited and came from the common schools in the localities where her

## LITTA

parents resided; but that part of her education, especially in the languages and literature, that was most valuable to her, was imparted by private instruction, perhaps in Cleveland and Paris. When still quite young she developed mentally and physically into beautiful womanhood. She was of medium height, with form rather slight but graceful, her complexion delicately fair; her hair was quite heavy, having a very light tinge of brown, not blonde perhaps, but rather light; her eyes were blue, neither large nor small, through which when under emotion her soul found strange expression. Although her mouth was large, it was not an unbecoming feature. It may be said all her features were cast in the finest mould and her social worth was of the best and purest. From tender child-

## THE VON ELSNERS

hood to maturity she was gentle, loving, and kind. At the dedication of the monument erected by friends at her grave, Senator David Davis, who presided at the ceremonies, paid a graceful tribute to her expressed in beautiful words, when he said "To Litta the woman first whose virtues shine out with lustre on her sex, and to Litta the artist second whose eminence is our local legacy, we are here to offer the tribute of our respect, of our admiration, and of our affection." That success which at last crowned her professional life brought with it no pride of position — if anything she became more gentle and loving. When she stood in the presence of thousands and heard the wildest applause it was not of herself she thought but of those she loved — especially of her father. It

## LITTA

would have been a source of the greatest satisfaction if her father could have survived to have witnessed the homage paid to her genius and her triumph in song. But she had a measure of compensation in that her mother, brothers, and sisters were permitted to share in her glory and in her newly-achieved fame.



II.

A PUPIL OF HER FATHER.

It was the beginning of her life work.

---

“Her sun rose through clouds in the morning.”

## A PUPIL OF HER FATHER.

THAT course of musical study which was to fit Litta for her life work was entered upon when she was a mere child, and pressed with unusual vigor until her genius and ability in the divine art of music was acknowledged both in Europe and America. Her natural gifts made her instruction in music less difficult and comparatively an easy task. In her early years her father was her only teacher—a work, he was eminently fitted for so far as teaching the science of music was concerned. It may be he was in no great degree skilled in teaching voice culture. That was a work that had to be done mainly by others, professional teachers of that wonderful art. The devo-

## LITTA

tion of the father to his little daughter in her tender years was something wonderful. He had faith in the ability of his child—and in the strength of her natural gifts to achieve ultimate success. In the matter of her musical education he became an enthusiast. That was about the only thing he ever pursued with unfaltering and well directed energy. Nothing was left undone, his limited means would enable him to do. As yet no friends had offered him any assistance to secure such training as would develop her wonderful natural vocal powers. He understood and certainly had a higher appreciation of her capabilities than any one else, and anticipated more confidently the possibilities that awaited her. His faith never faltered no matter what difficulties he encoun-

## A PUPIL OF HER FATHER

tered. Others with less hope and courage would have gone down in despondency under such discouraging circumstances. The world owes him a debt of gratitude for his unwavering faith in the powers of his gifted daughter, and his heroic efforts to develop that voice that afterwards charmed unnumbered thousands in Europe and America with the pathos of her song. A more sublime devotion to a single purpose was rarely ever witnessed anywhere in any age. It became the ruling passion of his life. Everything else was subordinated to the one purpose to develop the extraordinary musical talents which he believed she possessed.

He commenced teaching her when she was a mere child, and never ceased until she crossed the ocean to com-

## LITTA

plete her education with the great masters in the old world. He took her to all places where he thought her gifts and talents would be appreciated. On one occasion, it is said, he took her to that noted prima donna, Clara Louise Kellogg. At the close of an entertainment given in this city, he solicited and was granted the privilege for his child to sing before that queen of song. The child was timid in that distinguished presence and perhaps did not do herself justice. On being enquired of concerning the capacity of the little singer, Miss Kellogg's judgment was neither very favorable nor yet at all discouraging. She thought Marie had a "sweet voice." It is said she added the remark, her friends must not expect too much from her future. It is by no means certain Miss

## A PUPIL OF HER FATHER

Kellogg is correctly reported in this respect. Persons really great themselves are always most liberal and generous in their appreciation of the efforts of others to rise into distinction in the same profession. It is not probable that one so gifted as Miss Kellogg would speak discouragingly to a poor child with a "sweet voice." No criticism ever so unfavorable affected in the least degree her father's faith in the ultimate success of his child.

Often strange things come to pass in a brief time. The future is full of surprises. Unknown persons suddenly rise to positions of note in an incredibly short time. It was not long before that timid little singer that waited before that justly proud prima donna for a word that would give hope to her heart, herself became one of the most

## LITTA

famous singers on the American continent. She soon came to have a position among noted artists second to none. It was a practice with her father when Marie was yet a mere child to have her sing in parlors where friends had met to hear her, and in larger private gatherings, and she was always heard with the greatest delight. Probably her first appearance before what might be termed a public audience was before an assemblage of volunteer soldiers at Springfield, Illinois, in 1861. Marie was then only five years of age. She sang, "'Tis the Last Rose of Summer." A little timid girl, unattended by a mother or other female protector, in a camp of brave soldiers was an unusual sight. No doubt it may have brought to many the recollection of a little sister or



## A PUPIL OF HER FATHER

daughter in the home they had just left. As she stood alone in the midst of those brave and stalwart young men, clad in the dress of soldiers, and who were drilling for the deadly conflict on the field of battle, she sang in clear, sweet, and plaintive tones the beautiful words of one of Moore's sweetest verses,

"Since the lovely are sleeping,  
Go sleep thou with them."

Among all those brave men who heard her, there was probably no heart that was not deeply and tenderly touched. It may be it occurred to many of them, they had heard for the last time those tender words. And such proved to be true with many of them. The scene was an impressive one. A sudden stillness came over that gathering of brave men. They

## LITTA

wanted to hear every word she uttered. And then in still more plaintive tones she sang those other words of deepest pathos,

“So soon may I follow  
When friendships decay,  
And from love’s shining circle  
The gems drop away.”

It was not unmanly or unsoldierly that among the many hundreds that stood around that little girl and heard her sing in the sweet tones of her child voice, there were few, if any, whose eyes were not dimmed with tears. They called her the “child wonder,” and presented her with a beautiful present, appropriately inscribed.

On many occasions her sweet voice was heard in song in public places in her native city, and perhaps many times in the Academy of Music—a beautiful little auditorium since de-

## A PUPIL OF HER FATHER

stroyed by fire. It now become important to introduce Marie into a new and wider circle of more influential friends, that she might become better and more generally known to the public. Her voice had become perceptibly stronger, and showed distinctly the effects of well directed voice culture. When about the age of fourteen years her father, and perhaps her mother, who was intensely interested with her husband in the development of their child's wonderful vocal powers, took her to Chicago, Cleveland, and New York. In each of these cities she sang quite often and received the enthusiastic approbation of all who heard her—especially she was favorably received in Cleveland by people of the same nationality with her father. Her singing in these several cities brought some

## LITTA

income—perhaps enough to defray expenses. At Cleveland von Elsner became acquainted with Dr. Underner. This very kind gentleman soon took a great interest in Marie. He was at the head of a conservatory of music in that city, and he at once most generously undertook to aid in perfecting the musical education of the wonderful young singer. Later, when Marie was perhaps sixteen years of age, Dr. Underner entered into a contract with his pupil to give her instruction in music for five years, in consideration of which he was to have to himself the benefit of the last two years. That contract, a writer says, was signed by Madame von Elsner because her daughter was under that age when she could legally contract. It is not probable that much, if anything, was

## A PUPIL OF HER FATHER

done under that contract. It is certain it was not carried out.

Shortly after the making of the contract it was determined to send Marie to Europe for better instruction than it was thought could be procured for her in this country. Although the contract was abandoned, Dr. Underner never lost interest in his pupil. He was ever a faithful and valued friend, and his kind offices in behalf of Marie will ever be appreciated by her friends. The question as to how to raise sufficient funds to defray her expenses that now arose, was thought to present some difficulty. It was at first proposed to raise the necessary funds by subscription. But the necessity for resorting to that expedient was soon obviated. In that crisis a very generous friend, Mr. A. B. Hough, of

## LITTA

Cleveland—a very ardent admirer of the talents of Marie—came forward, and with a liberality seldom met with anywhere, offered to and did advance the entire amount necessary to defray all her expenses—a sum of no inconsiderable proportions. No one enquired of, seemed to know whether Mr. Hough exacted any promise from Marie or her friends to repay the money advanced by him on her account. It is not probable one so generous as Mr. Hough would have taken anything from the earnings of this poor child of genius had she offered to repay him. Such noble acts are not done for money considerations. But whether Mr. Hough was to be repaid or not, his name will ever be held in affectionate remembrance, not only by the close friends of Litta but by all

## A PUPIL OF HER FATHER

who in any land were touched and made happier by her sweet song. His name will be imperishably connected with hers through all time, and wherever her name is mentioned as one of America's greatest artists in music, benedictions will be invoked to rest upon her generous benefactor—Mr. A. B. Hough. Such men are an honor to the race.





III.

A QUEEN OF SONG.

“By a life laborious and heroic her  
girlhood witnessed the triumph of her  
genius.”

## A QUEEN OF SONG.

ON the 25th of October, 1874, Marie sailed for Europe to enter upon a course of study, it was expected would complete her musical education. She was then not much more than a child in years. Slender and rather delicate in person, but heroic in her purpose to overcome all difficulties and answer the expectations of her friends and especially of her father and mother. It is not known whether on the vessel that carried her across the ocean there was anyone she had ever known or seen before, except Dr. Underner who was with her. It was the first time she had ever been on the sea. It must have been a lonely voyage for one so young and one so unaccustomed to be sepa-

## LITTA

rated from parental affection. But after all it is probable the music of the deep sea in its ceaseless swelling and receding must have been a solace to her soul that no companionship of persons could have brought to her. Otherwise her voyage would have been depressingly lonely. There is a grandeur in the ever restless strong and ceaseless motion of the sea, that is only appreciated by great souls. It is not probable that on that vessel there was any one who appreciated the music of the sea so much as did this child whose very nature had been set in harmony with its sublime music. That was her only companionship on her journey. It seems that in some way Dr. Underner, ever thoughtful concerning her welfare, had secured in advance the kind offices of Mr. Mapleson, the great English *im-*

## A QUEEN OF SONG

*presario*, in behalf of his pupil — at least she received much attention from him. On arriving in London, Marie, in company with Dr. Underner, called on Sir Julius Benedict — a musician of some note and who was engaged with Jenny Lind as accompanist and musical director of the orchestra during her concert tour in the United States, and who set Bayard Taylor's ode to music and adapted it to her voice.

The coming of Jenny Lind to America had been announced by Barnum, that prince of advertisers. Poets had been offered prizes to write her praise in verse. A prize was awarded to Bayard Taylor for the best welcoming ode. It was afterward sung by Jenny Lind on her first appearance at Castle Garden. On her arrival at New York, on her coming to America, at the wharf

## LITTA

where the vessel landed, as she walked down the gangway she was greeted with cheers by many thousands of the most cultured ladies and gentlemen of that great city. Even the incoming of the vessel on which she made her voyage was signaled far off. An archway made of flowers had been erected under which she passed from the gangway to a carriage in waiting for her.

No press notices announced either the going or the arrival of Marie in London. She was poor and had not yet become famous. The poor have no following. Sycophants follow only after distinguished persons and after they have lost position they abandon them for other rising stars. When that lonely little girl reached the wharf at London, to her a strange city

## A QUEEN OF SONG

and yet a stranger people, she walked down the gangway from the vessel unnoticed by any one of the many whom she met and passed and yet that lonely young girl was destined soon to be heard in song on both sides of the ocean with nearly as much enthusiasm as was Jenny Lind herself. When she became great her following was also great. On hearing her sing Sir Julius Benedict pronounced her voice "a beautiful gift of nature"—a natural gift that most probably came to her by heredity from her mother. On reflection Sir Julius Benedict recommended her to place herself under the instruction of Madame Viardot, in Paris, which she accordingly did. On account of some unknown reason, it was deemed best to change teachers. It could hardly have been on account of

## LITTA

any want of confidence, for Madame Viardot was an eminent teacher of music, but later it will be seen she did make a change and selected as her teacher—Madame de la Grange. Nothing occurred during the period of her study in Paris under the instruction of Madame Viardot that is worthy of special mention. It seems her whole time was engaged in the study of operas. It was a period of hard and constant labor, and one of most intense anxiety, whether she would succeed in her chosen profession. After a course of study covering a period of a little more than a year she was engaged by Mr. Mapleson, the manager at that time of the "Drury Lane Theatre," to come to London. There, under the management of Mr. Mapleson she made her *debut* under the



## A QUEEN OF SONG

name of Signora Bronzini, on the 20th of May, 1876, in Robert le Diable. Accounts written of her first appearance in London would seem to show she did not meet public expectation. Her reception was not a failure by any means. The critics say the opera—Robert le Diable—in which she appeared was a very difficult one and not at all suitable for a *debutante*. However, she exhibited such ability in opera as gave promise of future success as a prima donna. It may be her effort was not altogether satisfactory to Mr. Mapleson—it is certain it was not to Marie herself. At all events it was determined she should return to Paris for further instruction. Although involved perhaps in some financial trouble about that time, Mr. Mapleson ever afterwards observed a watchful care for

## LITTA

Marie. He seems to have had faith in her ability to succeed and he watched her career with very great interest as he would one for whom he entertained a respectful regard.

On her return to Paris, Marie became acquainted with Madame de la Grange who afterwards came to have a great admiration for what she termed her "fresh and pure voice." A writer says that at first the Madame was not much impressed with Marie's voice but after repeated efforts before her new teacher she struck a few notes it is said, made her celebrated teacher start with surprise when she exclaimed "My child you have a voice. I will make a great artist of you." Her teacher encouraged her by the assurance she had "the sacred spark and would \* \* \* certainly become famous."





## A QUEEN OF SONG

Madame de la Grange at once became captivated with her pupil and from that time on took her under her care and protection and afforded her gratuitous instruction until she made her first appearance in Paris. Every-day the Madame discovered some new proofs of genius in her *protégé*. The second course of her study in Paris covered perhaps a period of another year and may be a little more. The instruction she received from Madame de la Grange was thorough and most improving. It was now the most anxious period in Marie's whole life. The hour was nigh at hand in which it would be determined whether she would succeed or fail. The intense anxiety she experienced was not altogether on her own account but on behalf of good friends in America and in Europe who had so

## LITTA

kindly and generously furnished her with money and with that which was of still more value, their loving sympathy. But her most anxious thoughts were for those on this side of the sea—her father and her mother and good friends in her native land. She was alone in a strange land and among a strange people. No, not alone. There is a strange affinity between great and noble souls that soon brings them close to each other. It is akin to that mysterious attraction that exists between the magnet and the steel—ever seeking to approach nearer to each other. Strangers with loving hearts came nigh that poor American girl in this, the supremest moment of her life, to strengthen her heart and bid her have hope and courage. Blessings on all who were kind to her in that hour.

## A QUEEN OF SONG

It was arranged she was to appear in the Theatre des Italiens, in Paris, where she would appear before an audience of the *elite* of that proud capital city and before the most accomplished musicians, and most exacting and merciless critics of the world. It was a fearful ordeal through which she was to pass, especially for one so young and with so little experience—it would have put to test the powers of the most renowned artist, and one accustomed to appearing before great and exacting audiences. The opera she was to appear in was Lucia di Lammermoor. Most keenly she realized she was to achieve fame or go down in obscurity. No doubt she approached the stage hesitatingly, with faltering steps, and with alternating hopes and fears; but the instant her foot touched the

## LITTA

boards and she beheld the vast assembly before which her trial for fame was to be made, her genius asserted itself and the grand powers of her soul manifested themselves in every feature of her countenance. Hers, thereafter, was the dominating mind over all that great presence. Not many moments elapsed before she had achieved a fame destined to be as wide as is the musical learning of the world. She overcame all adverse criticism. Critics who had come to write ill of her, went away to write only admiration of her splendid achievements. She had won a crown that belongs only to the victor. And what emotions must have filled the soul of that young girl from over the sea in the far off west in America.

Not many of all who composed that great assembly had ever seen her be-



## A QUEEN OF SONG

fore. They were strangers to her and felt no special interest in her success. A few, however, watched her every motion and listened for every note and one especially watched her with deepest solicitude — that was Madame de la Grange, her latest teacher. It soon became evident, her pupil had made a grand success which brought her the greatest satisfaction. Patiently she had instructed her and affectionately she had cared for her, and now in her triumph she felt she had a share in the honors paid to her pupil. It was her right and the friends of Litta will always hold her teacher in affectionate remembrance. The appreciation of the audience of her rendering of Lucia di Lammermoor became more and more evident as her voice grew in power and compass under the

## LITTA

pathos of the exciting story, she was unfolding in song. After the "mad scene," which is ever regarded as the crucial test of the powers of the greatest artists, she was called before the curtain when she received such an ovation as was seldom, if ever, accorded to anyone on any occasion in the old Italian Theatre. The honors offered her were received with becoming dignity of manner, and by common acclaim she was now crowned "queen of song." That was the first time she appeared under the name of Litta. Since then she has been better known as Litta than by her own name. It is not probable she is known among musicians very commonly by her child name, Marie Eugenia von Elsner. At the time of her first appearance in Paris her real name was but little known to the pub-

## A QUEEN OF SONG

lic—it was too distinctly German to be very popular at that time in the capital of France. In what follows, the name, Litta, will be used instead of her real name.

The Parisian press was enthusiastic in writing her praise. There was no adverse criticism by the press or the most fault-finding critics. Before her *debut* some had thought her features were not comely and that she was wanting in graceful action. But all that disappeared under the excitement incident to an appearance on the stage in the presence of an immense audience. She was charmingly graceful in every motion and her features wore a fascinating expression. The effect of her rendering of the opera Lucia di Lammermoor is pleasantly told by a Paris correspondent of a New York jour-

## LITTA

nal from which is taken the following excerpt: "That night will remain in the memory of every one who was present; no greater triumph than that of M'lle Litta was ever known even within the time honored walls of the Italien Theatre of Paris. Captious connoisseurs started with amazement as the purest soprano voice heard for many years rang through the building; callous exquisites were surprised into an emotion by the warm life-like impersonation of Bellini's ill-fated heroine. From act to act the success of the *debutante* increased; the connoisseurs hung upon her every note and even the least scientific of the hearers felt a thrill which followed the exquisite modulations of that glorious voice. The enthusiasm became general and swelled into an ovation such as has not been

## A QUEEN OF SONG

known since the days of Grisi. There was the genuine ring and not the counterfeit sound of a hired demonstration. Cynical critics and listless swells joined in the manifestations of delight; ladies clapped until they burst their gloves and threw their own bouquets upon the stage. Lifted above her doubts and fears by the enthusiastic reception and inspired by her theme, Litta surpassed herself and surprised even her friends. For perfect vocalization, earnest feeling, and dramatic power, her rendering of the mad scene, that test of a cantatrice, was a truly wonderful performance. Even the would-be witty critics who had at first endeavored to raise a laugh at her large mouth—her square shoulders—forgot to sneer and lost sight of her physical defects and sat

## LITTA

absorbed and hushed throughout the thrilling scene. When the curtain fell the entire orchestra rose to their feet and the grand songstress who had held that audience under the charm of her talents was recalled with a whirlwind of applause. Such a scene of enthusiasm is rare at the Italiens whose polished critical *habitués* are seldom raised to such heights of interest and delight. The smiling, enraptured girl received an ovation she will certainly remember to her dying day and at the close of that performance found herself crowned a queen of song. Her triumph was complete, almost unparalleled. \* \* \* The young American girl, unknown and almost friendless the day before, had risen in that one evening to the utmost heights of musical fame."

## A QUEEN OF SONG

Writing of Litta's first appearance in Paris at the Italiens, Miss Kate Field said: "It would seem an exaggeration almost to state with what enthusiasm M'lle Litta was hailed when she finally revealed her talent. Even the *habitués* of the Italian opera in its halcyon days can remember few such scenes of excitement. And there was the true ring about the ovation M'lle Litta raised, none of the hired applause with the *élite* smiling coldly at the venal demonstration; none of the bouquets bought before hand and thrown upon the stage by dummies. No, it was all genuine admiration. Ladies stood up in their boxes and burst their gloves clapping; the entire orchestra declared her the young artist with one voice. Elegantes threw upon the stage the bouquets they had brought

## LITTA

with them and held through the evening. Time after time thundering calls brought the young American lady before the curtain, blushing with heartfelt delight. The enthusiasm increased as M'lle Litta proceeded with her fine impersonation and the *summum* was after the scene of Lucia's madness which is famous as one of the most severe tests, not only for the singer, but for the dramatic artist. M'lle Litta went through the crushing ordeal with inspired energy and this was her grand triumph. A very whirlwind of applause burst forth after this hackneyed scene which the new star rendered really harrowing by her life-like action. This final ovation set the seal upon her reputation and stamped her as one of the first artists of modern times."

After her first appearance, Litta



## A QUEEN OF SONG

remained at the Italiens for some months. The brilliant success achieved was not obscured or dimmed in the least by any performance given after the night of her triumph. A writer says, "all Paris flocked to hear her in her different roles" in which she gained new laurels in each performance. Her fame had now spread through the musical circles of the old world and across the sea to her native land—a land she had left so recently as an unknown student of music and to which she would return as a famous prima donna.



IV.  
A SWEET VOICE.

“My child, you have a voice.”

—*Madame de la Grange.*

---

“The flute song in the mad scene displayed Litta’s voice at its best.”

—*Press Notice.*

## A SWEET VOICE.

AFTER the close of the season in Paris and a brief time spent at Vienna, she returned to America in October, 1878, under the management of Max Strakosch—a distinguished manager in opera and concert music. She came directly to Bloomington—her native city, where her mother and family still resided. Hugo von Elsner, her father, had died during her absence in Europe. Shortly after her return to her home a reception was tendered her by Capt. and Mrs. J. H. Burnham—the latter her cousin—to which many citizens were invited, so both young and old, who had been her friends in her childhood days might come near her and renew their former

## LITTA

loving acquaintanceship with her. On that occasion brief ceremonies were had intended to manifest personal respect for her, and addresses were made in which graceful tributes were paid to her on account of the eminent success she had achieved since she had left home as a mere child. At that little gathering it was suggested to a close friend of hers it would be a graceful thing to do to present Litta with a testimonial that would evidence to her the high esteem in which she was held. The reply was, she would appreciate more, any offering to her mother than any testimonial that could be made to herself. Accordingly the matter was further considered and soon sufficient funds were raised with which a neat cottage was purchased and presented to her mother, in which







## A SWEET VOICE

Litta made her own home when not engaged in traveling. Later, while still at home, she gave a concert at Durley Hall, that she might appear before her friends among whom she had lived in her childhood years. The hall in which she sang was crowded to its utmost capacity with her immediate friends and those who had been her childhood companions constituting a great audience who had often heard Clara Louise Kellogg and other famous singers. It is not mere panegyric or over-stating the fact to say that Litta suffered no disparagement in comparison with that queen of song—Miss Kellogg. Her friends were enchanted with her sweet, clear, and ringing voice as heard in song. There was not one in that large audience but was as proud of her achievements in music as though

## LITTA

it was a triumph in which each and all of them had a part. A splendid ovation was accorded her which she greatly appreciated as it came from her childhood friends.

The first appearance of Litta in America in opera was at McVicker's Theatre, in Chicago, on the 16th of November, 1878, under the management of Max Strakosch, of which mention will be made later.

Now that Litta is about to enter upon her tour in America under the management of Max Strakosch, it may be appropriate to enquire what unusual gift it was that enabled her to achieve so large a measure of success—not only in her home land, but in foreign countries. She was not only herself poor but she was the daughter of parents not rich in material wealth.

## A SWEET VOICE

Nor had she any rich friend or friends in high position who would lend the influence of their station to enable her to secure public favor. She trod the "wine press alone \* \* \* there were none to help." Her strength lay in her indomitable and unfaltering energy. In that respect she had scarcely a peer anywhere. But what was the secret of great success? It is certain her fame did not come from mere panegyric from over-zealous friends. Under the same management with her when she made her first American tour, were Miss Kellogg, Miss Cary, and other noted singers and who sang with her on alternate nights during her engagement in all the great American cities. In the great musical centers of Europe, as in Paris, Vienna, and other great cities she sang on alternate nights

## LITTA

with Nilsson and other famous prima donnas. She must have had high merit to have sustained herself in such positions. It was a brilliant galaxy of the greatest singers of the age. It is not an over-statement of her great powers to say that Litta's name "led all the rest" in popular favor in those engagements in which only great artists in song participated. Wherever she sang, upon her was placed the crown of greatest excellence. It will be seen she was heard with equal pleasure by non-professional people, who care very little for what musicians perhaps call the technique in the execution of the music itself. That of course is much more appreciated by professional singers and teachers than by the unscinded in music. But in that respect she was not wanting in high qualifica-

## A SWEET VOICE

tions—taking rank with the most noted prima donnas.

A critic, competent to judge of her qualifications in this respect, writing of her said: "Her roundelays are executed with wonderful velocity, and those in staccato are wonderfully clear. Her trills, even in altissimo, are perfectly clear and balanced; her technique throughout is not only wonderful but is elegant and artistic—never prejudices the tone, is not characterized by musical artifices which are so common with many prima donnas; the work is thoroughly legitimate." It may be her distinction did not come from acting in opera or her bearing on the stage in the presence of the public. It is not probable that much of it did. But while it may be conceded she possessed in no great degree what might be called

## LITTA

“stage action,” yet she had in a wonderful measure that simplicity and naturalness of movement that lent a charm to her every action in pleasing contrast with “stage posing.” One writer in speaking of her said, “Miss Litta has a great deal besides her beautiful voice to recommend her \* \* \* She breathes as all singers ought to breathe, naturally and without effort, even the preparation for a *tour enforce* being made almost imperceptibly.” Another said, “In the scene with Henry Ashton she was listened to with keen attention and her acting and singing in the marriage contract scene were admirable.” One writing of her in graceful language, referring to her personal appearance in the title role of “Lucia,” in which she made her first appearance and first success

## A SWEET VOICE

in Paris, said, "She is a blonde of statuesque form with strongly marked but prepossessing countenance and with a stage presence that is easy and unaffected."

A New York Journal none too friendly to her said, "As for her acting, the nervousness apart from an appearance on the stage, it may be safely said that no such clever and effective work has before been done by so frail and youthful prima donna. Nothing is required to make Miss Litta a very great artist, but physical strength and that experience which inevitably comes with time." It must always be remembered that Litta was born in a western village and lived during her childhood years among a people plain in their habits and that affected no style that was not natural. She

## LITTA

was simply a child of nature. In all her acting, in private life, and in all she said there was something that is indescribable that lent a charm to her very appearance and to her every movement that is only observed in persons of natural and unaffected bearing. In early life she knew not how to act only as nature taught her and that is always graceful and charming.

When transferred into the presence of the elite of the proud capital of France it would have been strange, indeed, if some of the manners of her child life in her country home in the west of America did not appear to be lacking in the polish and elegance of court manners. That fact, no doubt, subjected her to some unfavorable criticism. But all that she finally over-



## A SWEET VOICE

come, and she came to have in her acting grace, elegance, and ease. It was the result of a naturalness and innate simplicity of manners that come from no education. It was the unaffected style of a child, which is always beautiful in contrast with the artificial manner of one educated under rules framed to control actions. It was this child-like simplicity of manner that secured for her much flattering commendation as to her personal appearance. She was appreciated by all who loved that which was beautiful and true in nature, rather than that which is artificial and false in character. Finally these simple traits in her character caused her to be much admired by the most cultured people. It was that which invested her with a dignified and pleasing bearing, even in the pres-

## LITTA

ence of the nobility of the old world. But there is to be added to all this the fact she was attractive in form and features. Photographs of the Strakosch Opera Company of 1879 were taken in a group, among whom were Miss Cary, Litta, and Miss Kellogg. Litta is the central figure and the other members of the company are grouped around her, Miss Cary and Miss Kellogg nearest to Litta. She was the youngest of the group and in comeliness of features and in expression indicating most thought. Litta was certainly the peer of either of her friendly rivals in song, in that cluster of our great American prima donnas.

But after all, while it is true Litta had much else that gave her distinction, it was her voice that made her famous in the world of music. Tech-

## A SWEET VOICE

nical terms known to musicians are inadequate to give any clear idea of the real charm of her voice. The great teachers of music and voice culture in Europe and America on hearing her sing for the first time, in their expressions of admiration of the strange power of her voice, discarded all technical phrases and spoke of it in the simple words of the heart when moved by emotion—in the plain words of the people, that means so much. Sir Julius Bededict, on hearing her sing, pronounced her voice a “beautiful gift of nature.” Madame de la Grange, on hearing her pronounce certain notes, exclaimed with unconcealed emotion, “My child, you have a voice.” It was common with these great teachers whose experience had taught them to listen even for a single note that would

## LITTA

indicate the power or worth of a voice to speak of Litta's voice as "fresh and pure," and as though this was not expressive enough, they called her's a "sweet voice." The consensus of public opinion, both professional and non-professional, was in accord in respect to the charming and fascinating power of her voice as will appear from the following excerpts taken from contemporary notices in the great journals of the period — musical and others:

"Her voice is high soprano, good and true; strong, fluent, and generally brilliant — a very serviceable, effective, and noble voice, capable of doing admirable work." "Miss Litta has a voice of unusual sweetness and purity, every tone is as clear and true as those of a flute." "Her voice is one of remarkable sweetness and roundness in all the

## A SWEET VOICE

registers and is very agreeable in quality and of more than ordinary compass. The most salient feature of her voice perhaps is its wonderful flexibility and in this respect it is almost phenomenal. Such vocal agility in fact has been rarely witnessed here or such marvelous method since the time of Labordi." "Miss Litta deserves the praise lavished upon her voice by the western press. It is indeed remarkable for purity and evenness of tone \* \* \* Her execution is wonderfully fluent and exact and she surmounted all vocal difficulties of the opera with perfect ease." "Her voice is one of extraordinary sweetness and power; is perfectly under control and is of a clear, joyful, bird-like quality quite indescribable." "Her voice is not only very agile, but it is fresh, limpid, sympathetic, and remark-

## LITTA

ably even in its emissions. Her intonation is pure; her sotta-voce almost as fine as Nilsson's; her phrasing clear and intelligent, and she never descends to trickery or artifice. On the other hand there is a natural simplicity in her style that makes one forget her art." These notices of her exquisite and unusually sweet voice might be multiplied many times. They appeared in the press notices of her singing wherever she appeared in all parts of our country—especially when she sang opera in the role of "Lucia," in Donizetti's great opera, "Lucia di Lammermoor." It was in that opera, her voice was heard at its best and in it her greatest success was achieved both in Europe and in America.

V.

WITH THE STRAKOSCH OPERA  
COMPANY.

“That a young American girl so rarely gifted to begin with has attained such artistic excellence is especially pleasing.”

---

“In the mad scene, the florid music of which is so admirably suited to her voice, her pure ripply tones shaming the flute obbligato, she created a veritable sensation.”

—*New York press notice.*



## STRAKOSCH OPERA COMPANY.

IT was expected, Litta would commence her engagement with the Strakosch Opera Company early in the fall of 1878, but some trouble arose between Strakosch and Litta and her friends in reference to the contract between them. It seems that Strakosch had secured a contract from Litta in Paris, before her return to Amercia. That contract was thought not to be at all favorable to her. It was especially unsatisfactory to her good friends, Professor Underner and Mr. Hough, of Cleveland. It also conflicted with the contract Litta had made with Professor Underner, under which she was sent to Paris to complete her musical studies. Under that contract Pro-

## LITTA

fessor Underner was perhaps to have in a measure at least the management of her singing after her return to America, whether in concert or opera during a series of years definitely agreed upon, and it may be he was to have a certain share of her earnings during the time mentioned. The exact terms of that contract are not definitely known to the writer, but it is certain Professor Underner had a contract with Litta with which the Strakosch contract conflicted. That was one cause of the difficulty.

The Strakosch Opera Company, as organized for the season of 1878-1879, was a most brilliant one, and contained among its members such noted prima donnas as Kellogg, Litta, and Cary and other great singers on the lyric stage of that day. It was the desire

## STRAKOSCH OPERA COMPANY

of the friends of Litta that she should make her first appearance in America with that brilliant troupe, but her friends would not be satisfied that she should take any second position with that or any other company. It was an objection with some that under the first Strakosch contract, Litta would be required to sing second to Kellogg. Indeed the advertisement of the troupe seemed to indicate that would be the case. That was especially unsatisfactory to Litta's friends. But Mr. Strakosch explained that was not the intention. The arrangement, he said, would be that Kellogg would sing on one night and Litta on another. It was further explained that a prima donna is accorded a first, second, or an intermediate place by the hold she might take on the people. Accord-

## LITTA

ingly it was said if Litta should sing better than Kellogg her name would appear first on the bills. Afterwards Litta became a great favorite with the public and she was given a fair opportunity to display the wonderful powers of her voice.

Happily the difficulty with Strakosch was adjusted by a friendly conference and the first contract made in Paris was cancelled and a new one made that was more satisfactory to both parties, and also to the friends of Litta. It was then announced that Litta would make her debut in Chicago in the role of "Lucia" in the opera—*Lucia di Lammermoor*. That was the beginning of a brilliant American tour in which she achieved an unprecedented success.

Litta's *repertoire* consisted of all the

## STRAKOSCH OPERA COMPANY

best and most popular operas, but she most generally selected for her first appearance in any of the great American cities, "Lucia di Lammermoor," perhaps because she was more favorably known to the public in that opera than in any other. It may have been for the further reason it was a favorite with her as it was thought it afforded better opportunity for the display of the wonderful flexibility of her voice. The announcement that Litta would sing "Lucia di Lammermoor" with the Strakosch company, at McVicker's Theatre in Chicago, created a sensation among her personal friends in Cleveland and in Bloomington. Many of Litta's best friends lived in Cleveland and she was always very grateful to them for their exceeding great kindness to her. While always remember-

## LITTA

ing her Cleveland friends with an unceasing gratitude and often mentioned many of them by endearing names, yet wherever she went in her own or in foreign lands, whether in adversity or in prosperity her heart turned most lovingly to her native home, humble though it was, with tenderest recollection of what it had been to her in childhood days and in a most touchingly beautiful letter she wrote: "Bloomington is my home and I am proud of it, and the many kindnesses I have received from the people have filled my heart with gratitude and I say frankly that there is no place like my old home, home, sweet home." Would that these, her own loving words had been chiseled deep on that column that marks her final resting place in the city of our own

## STRAKOSCH OPERA COMPANY

dead, there to endure until that solid granite itself shall have become dust in the air.

As the time for her appearance in Chicago drew nigh, delegations in Bloomington and in Cleveland were preparing to go to that city to hear her sing. It would be her first appearance in opera in America and her close friends in both cities wished to be near her that she might feel their sympathy and have courage for the trying ordeal through which she was to pass. Barring her first appearance in Paris, it would be the supremest hour in her life. It was in her native land and among her friends that she was to sing for fame. It was a brilliant and magnificent audience that came to greet her. The auditorium was filled to its utmost capacity with the best

## LITTA

cultured people of that great city of the West. Miss Kellogg occupied a conspicuous position with two lady friends in a box on the left, and Miss Cary sat in the dress circle on the right. Miss Marco was also in the audience. Litta was younger than either of those distinguished prima donnas who by their presence graced the great assembly before which she was to appear.

From thousands of warm hearts went up a silent prayer for strength for that timid but gifted child of song that she might overcome and achieve a grand triumph. Whatever fears and doubts Litta may have had in appearing before that distinguished presence, like her experience in Paris, the moment she stepped on the platform, it was evident her genius was superior to



## STRAKOSCH OPERA COMPANY

her apprehensions and that grand triumph her friends so devoutly wished for, was assured. She looked like a queen of song and her friends were never so proud of her before. She had now won fame on two continents. Seldom, if ever, was such a wild ovation tendered to any one in that historic old theatre as was given to Litta on that occasion. Among that vast audience that rose to render homage to her genius, there were none who manifested a more sincere and earnest exultation over Litta's splendid triumph than did her distinguished sisters in song—Miss Kellogg and Miss Cary. No words can convey any adequate idea of the exciting emotions that prevailed. It was a wild scene that admits of no description. Men applauded and ladies waved on high their hand-

## LITTA

kerchiefs and threw their bouquets at her feet. The press recorded the common verdict of all who heard her, with not a single exception, in most favorable words of praise of her splendid triumph. One of the great dailies of that city after speaking in most felicitous terms of the wonderful flexibility of her voice, has this to say further: "Her finest success was in the duo with the flute in the last act which was fairly dazzling in *floriture*, especially in the cadenza, which we believe La Grange wrote for her, and created such *furore* that the whole audience arose to the artist and greeted her with bravos and cheers. At the end of the opera, the audience started to call her again before the curtain and give her a parting plaudit of cheers. The writer has witnessed

## STRAKOSCH OPERA COMPANY

every operatic presentation in Chicago during the last twenty-five years and cannot recall a similarly enthusiastic scene." The entire press of the city were in accord in their judgment that Litta had shown herself one of the greatest artists of the age in music.

After the close of the opera season in Chicago, the Strakosch company went east, and it is probable they sang first in New York. It was thought by some critics that Litta had come to New York at an unfortunate moment. Gerster had been there and achieved a brilliant success. One writer said, "there has been a Gerster fever which has not yet abated. Even if Litta were superior to Gerster hardly anybody will be ready to confess it, and Litta will have to conquer obstacles." She sang in the role of Lucia in "Lucia

## LITTA

di Lammermoor" and she did "conquer obstacles." She "conquered" everything, and carried that vast assembly of cultured people that had come to greet her in that greatest city on the American continent as if by storm. She even gained a victory over Gerster, as will be seen from the following paragraph contained in the Dramatic News: "There is indeed all this difference between Gerster and Litta, that one is a finished artist, an accomplished fact, while the other is a budding promise. Five years hence, if Miss Litta makes the progress in her art which in the natural course of circumstances she must make, the comparison between Gerster and herself will be all in her favor. Gerster has reached the limit of all she can ever be, and that is a phenominal light

## STRAKOSCH OPERA COMPANY

soprano. Litta has a voice fully as pure in quality as Gerster's, but of a graver and more powerful timbre. It must increase in capacity and largeness with the girl's years." After hearing her the entire press of New York were prodigal, even lavish, in praise of Litta's unfolding in song the sad story of Lucia, the "bride," as told in Donizetti's "Lucia di Lammermoor." Her method was especially mentioned as excellent. It was said of her "the most commendable of all her good musical qualities are her phrasings and intelligent expression. For so young an artist her acquirements are as remarkable as her natural gifts." After speaking of the rapture with which she was listened to in the marriage scene, the New York Herald added, "In the mad scene

## LITTA

the florid music of which is so admirably suited to her voice, her pure, rippling tones shaming the flute obbligato, she created a veritable sensation and secured the general verdict that in music of this nature she leaves scarcely anything to be desired. That a young American girl so rarely gifted to begin with has attained such artistic excellence, is especially pleasing."

Shortly after the close of their stay in New York the Strakosch company went to Boston to sing an engagement. Litta carried with her many pleasant recollections of New York, on account of the favor with which she was heard in song in that, the principal American city. She had now become a leading star in that brilliant troupe. One writing of her on another occasion ran a parallel between Litta and Kellogg, in

## STRAKOSCH OPERA COMPANY

which it was said, "from the opinions expressed by our most musical people there seems to be no doubt that of the two great prima donnas who visited our city the past week, Litta's singing gave far better satisfaction than Kellogg's. Of the two, Litta's stage manner is more modest and pleasing, while her execution of difficult passages is unmistakably superior. That Litta is to be the reigning musical star of America is an almost assured fact." Most anxiety was therefore manifested to hear her. Her coming to Boston was looked forward to with much interest. She was to sing to the cultured people of that city, for the first time, and as her fame had preceded her, much was expected of her. It is only recording the truth to say, that expectation was not disappointed. It

## LITTA

was even more than realized. As usual she appeared in her first performance in the role of the heroine in Lucia di Lammermoor, her favorite opera. She captured that people—a people so competent to judge of excellence in music and oratory. They had often heard the master minds of both Europe and America. So flattering were the press notices everywhere that Litta was led to say, she seemed to have a good friend in every newspaper office, and so it proved to be in Boston. Rarely, if ever, did she have said of her so much that was pleasing as by the press of that famous city. Not an adverse criticism of either her singing or her acting appeared in any of the Boston journals. On the contrary, every notice of her first appearance in that city was extremely favorable and



## STRAKOSCH OPERA COMPANY

gratifying to her. In one of them it was said, "the reception given to the *debutante* was most hearty and the lady has no cause to complain of her audience upon this occasion, as every number of her role was generously applauded, recalls frequent, and beautiful floral tributes were presented to her. The flute song in the mad scene displayed Litta's voice at the best and her rendering of this part aroused the enthusiasm of the audience and a grand demonstration."

The opportunity is much appreciated to reproduce the graceful tribute paid to Litta by the Boston Journal on that occasion, in diction as elegant as the subject matter is complimentary: "The opera Lucia served to introduce to our public the young American soprano, Miss Marie Litta. We may say

## LITTA

without reservation that her success was of the most gratifying and brilliant character. It required but little in her opening scene to convince the audience that she possessed great merit and the good impression she created thus early in the opera was deepened and strengthened as the performance progressed; in the mad scene she was heard at her best for the reason its demands are greatest. The aria with the flute obbligato was rendered with the utmost grace and nicety of execution and so was the number that followed. In addition to the applause which generously rewarded her efforts at the time, there was a grand ovation at the end of the scene when the young artist was again and again called out. As an actress she displayed great intelligence, if not all the freedom and

## STRAKOSCH OPERA COMPANY

skill that will follow a great stage experience. In brief, Litta won a genuine success." The Boston Advertiser very pleasantly said of her, "Miss Litta, a young American prima donna who appeared as the heroine, was heard on this occasion for the first time in Boston and she achieved a decided success. \* \* \* In her singing she showed more than promise; she reached the period of noble achievement \* \* \* In the mad scene she won a complete triumph over the audience, her delivery in its more than exacting portions being exceptional for excessive brilliancy of tone and freedom of execution." Litta left Boston with many pleasant recollections.

The itinerary of the Strakosch Opera Company embraced all the larger cities in the United States and in Can-

## LITTA

ada. As they went from city to city it was in fact a triumphal tour for Litta. The press notices everywhere were much alike in their complimentary character. Especially in Philadelphia, Baltimore, and St. Louis, she was received with great favor. It was said of her at St. Louis: "Miss Litta sang beautifully last night. The auditorium was thronged and the performance was a glorious triumph. The music of the composer rose from her lips in silver tones and was characterized with all the earnest soul and noble feeling of genuine art. This is the most successful of all Miss Litta's roles. She charmed the audience into admiration at the very start and carried it to the close of her part. Every solo was enthusiastically encored and at the end of the second act she was called

## STRAKOSCH OPERA COMPANY

before the curtain twice and after the mad scene in the third, the tribute of admiration reached three calls."

On going to the gulf states she was heard with as much enthusiasm and interest as she had been in the North, where was her native home. Crossing the continent she sang in opera at San Francisco, where her voice, so sweet and so full of expression, created a great sensation and she became the most popular prima donna that ever visited the Pacific coast. She sang in opera as far north as Halifax and as far south as Galveston. Her fame had gone before her to all these great centers of population and culture, and in none of them was there ever any disappointment in the expectation raised as to her great and wonderful vocal powers. It was the

## LITTA

common judgment of the educated and of the uneducated in music, that no description of her voice could convey any just idea of its thrilling power and of its wide and flexible compass. On all occasions she surpassed what the public had been led to expect from her. In all the cities visited she received from the people nothing but kindness, for which she was most grateful. The attention paid her in Boston, New York, Baltimore, Washington, New Orleans, Chicago, San Francisco, and, indeed, everywhere else where she sang was often recalled by her with especially pleasing and grateful recollection. If she valued the polite attentions paid to her in one city more than another, it was in San Francisco. In that great city on the far off Pacific coast her friends presented her, two

## STRAKOSCH OPERA COMPANY

lovely souvenirs, which she gratefully appreciated. One of them was a heavy and beautifully wrought chain of Etruscan gold from which hung a locket thickly crusted with diamonds.





VI.

CONCERT TOURS.

“The music of the composer rose from her lips in silver tones and was characterized with all the earnest soul and noble feeling of genuine art.”

--*St. Louis press notice.*

## CONCERT TOURS.

**I**T is doubtless true that Litta's greatest successes both in Europe and in America were achieved in opera. After an engagement of two seasons with Max Strakosch in opera in America, she felt constrained to give it up. But she always expressed a greater liking for operatic than for concert music. It is probable her only reason for abandoning opera was because it was too expensive to conduct an opera troupe. Very large houses were necessary to even pay expenses and not very much was ever left for profits. Still she always gave in her concerts some selections from the most popular operas. Undoubtedly it was more profitable to abandon opera—certainly

## LITTA

in America. The expense of a first-class opera troupe and maintaining it is so great it is difficult to realize from entertainments given, much more than actual expenses.

Jenny Lind, however, from choice abandoned the opera and during her entire American tour sang only in concerts, except occasionally like Litta she gave selections from favorite operas. She did not abandon opera because it would not be profitable, but it is said it was done on account of religious scruples. It would no doubt have been profitable to her and also her manager—Mr. Barnum. Under his management almost any enterprise—certainly any business that depended on public patronage would be money making in a large measure. It is said there was much disappointment with

## CONCERT TOURS

many in this country that they could not hear Jenny Lind sing in opera. But Mr. Barnum was distinctly informed before making the contract with her, she would not sing in opera.

There was something in the characters of Jenny Lind and Litta that was nearly akin. Both were extremely simple in their tastes, and neither of them had any desire for pomp and ceremony. By nature both were refined and their gentle natures were cultivated into the best womanhood. Both were distinguished for their kindness to the lowly in life, and especially the poor. Litta was often photographed in groups of eminent singers and it was plainly perceptible that her's was the best face and wore the kindest expression. It is known that photographs, especially daguerreotypes do not al-

## LITTA

ways look like the subject. Perhaps it is for the reason, when the beautiful light out of the heavens fall on a person it brings out some image of the soul—the real man—which the camera seizes and retains. It is then something is discovered not before seen in the face photographed. Hawthorne makes one of his characters—the daguerreotypist—say: “There is a wonderful insight in Heaven’s broad and simple sunshine. While we give it credit for depicting the merest surface, it really brings out the secret character.” Litta was very cheerful when surrounded by her friends, yet in many—not all—photographs taken of her there is a tinge of sadness on her features that seems to be appealing for sympathy. What that expression was is not susceptible of description.

## CONCERT TOURS

Its meaning is only comprehended by looking upon it. Looking now upon a photograph of her after the lapse of so many years since her features were seen in the bloom and brightness of her youth, that same look is still there and one is inclined to say, poor Litta! That expression is most distinctly seen in her face in the "Strakosch group" and in another group with a concert troupe, where her head is slightly inclined to one side. A slight indication of the same expression may be noticed in the frontis-piece. There is also a trace of that strange tinge of sadness in some few of the photographs taken of Jenny Lind shortly before leaving America for her home across the sea. Was it sadness or only weary care? None can know what burdens other hearts bear.

## LITTA

After severing her connection with that brilliant opera company under the management of that great *impresario*—Max Strakosch—Marie Litta devoted her later life work to concert singing. In this connection it is pleasing to recall the affection, Litta bore to the members of the company with whom she had been associated. Whether Mr. Strakosch was at all times just and liberal or not, she only had the kindest words for him. Of her great sisters in song—Miss Kellogg and Miss Cary—she never mentioned their names unless in most loving and endearing terms. Their exceeding great kindness to her was most gratefully appreciated by Litta. Her engagement with the Strakosch Opera Company run through two seasons, and after leaving that company she formed a new com-



## CONCERT TOURS

pany. It is probable that company sang in opera and in concert. It was not a prosperous venture, nor was it an entirely harmonious company. It may be that company as first organized did not remain together for any great length of time.

In her concert tours, Litta traversed the United States from the Lakes, south to the Gulf and across the continent from sea to sea—singing in all the large cities and in many villages. Wherever she went she was greeted with the same unbounded enthusiasm as when she sang in opera. It was a continuous triumphal tour. The people and the press were in accord in rendering homage to her genius. Nowhere was that feeling more gracefully expressed than at Saratoga. Writing of her wonderful voice, it was

## LITTA

said by one who had heard her sing: "Of Marie Litta we can speak only in terms of highest praise. Her voice is a clear and beautiful soprano, of exquisite quality, that even her pianissimo passages were distinctly heard throughout the large hall, and her tones have that indescribable pathetic power which is vouchsafed to but a few singers in a generation. She is a genuine artist with a natural genius for moving her auditors by the tones of her voice and uses that marvelous organ with the most consummate grace and skill. Of the two numbers assigned to her on the program, the "Carnival of Venice," by Sir Julius Benedict, which abounds in ornament and *floritura* was rendered with a power and grace which brought forth round after round of applause. She responded to

## CONCERT TOURS

the demand of the audience by singing a stanza of "Home, Sweet Home," in a manner which showed how genius could adorn even the most familiar air, and was greeted with the same universal plaudits as before."

Like the press notices of her singing in opera, the notices of Litta's concerts might be multiplied many times, but to do that would give no clearer idea of the estimation in which she was held by the public. The feeling manifested towards her was akin to affection. Among the many hundreds of press notices examined, not one has been found that contains anything unkind of her. Few of all who have appeared on the lyric stage in this country, were ever so kindly appreciated.

Although Litta's services were con-

## LITTA

constantly sought by managers so that she was never without an engagement, it is not thought she ever saved much money to be invested. She earned a great deal of money, but her expenses were correspondingly large. Her father at the time of his death, was owing many small sums which in the aggregate amounted to quite a sum of money. But these debts she paid even to the uttermost farthing. Not a claim that she could hear of, whether just or unjust, was left unpaid. She wanted it understood that no one who had been kind enough to help him in money matters ever lost a dollar by so doing or any sum great or small. It is probable she was not herself a prudent manager of her earnings, which were quite large. But whether she had good business qualifi-

## CONCERT TOURS

cations or not she had no time she could devote to such matters and it was unfortunate for her that she did not engage a good financial agent to manage her business affairs. Her last engagement was with the Slayton Lyceum Company. It is probable that would have been a profitable season had her health continued good so she could have performed her contract. Evidences of failing health were discovered early in her engagement, induced, it is confidently believed, by overwork.

After her return to America from Paris, Litta's career in song was brilliant, but of brief duration—covering not much more than four years. It was, however, a period of great physical exertion and of intense mental strain. She was ambitious to accom-

## LITTA

plish a great work, and to enable her to do that she undertook more than either her physical or mental strength would endure with impunity. Conscientious to an unusual degree in all her engagements, she was over anxious to perform them and could not be induced to take needed rest. Of all who stood in close relation with her and had in a measure the direction of her movements, none seemed to exercise more good judgment than Professor Underner and Madame de la Grange. When Litta was with Professor Underner, her father wanted to take on a concert tour, but the professor advised against it on the ground her health was such it might be very detrimental to her. Happily his advice was taken and she was permitted to take a needed rest of some months duration.

## CONCERT TOURS

When in Paris Madame de la Grange saw that Litta needed a vacation from her studies and she compelled her to take it. It would have been well for Litta if she could have had the provident care and the wise instruction of Madame de la Grange during her American tour.

Later, Litta's friends came to realize that she was doing too much—more than her strength would bear. It was discovered her health was failing. It became a matter of profound regret that her managers and her friends that stood nearest to her did not interfere to compel her to cease from all labor for a time at least. It must be confessed the public are not always kind or even just to noted singers. Too much is demanded of them. Burdens are too often laid upon it is

## LITTA

neither just nor reasonable to ask them to bear. It was so with Litta, and yet her generous disposition would not permit her to deny any request in the nature of a public demand. That, in part, at least, brought her life prematurely to an end. Constantly she was importuned to sing for the benefit of some public charity, when she ought to have been allowed to rest. She was besieged "in season" and out of season" to make donations to public objects, such as libraries, hospitals, and other charitable institutions, and most often she complied with such requests when she really did not have the money she could spare. She said herself she was constantly in the receipt of letters from all over the states, importuning her to undertake the education and maintenance of young girls



## CONCERT TOURS

who wished to study music. It is not doubted she had applications for charitable gifts far in excess of her earnings,—large as they were. And yet in another way the public were often cruelly unjust to her. The demand made upon her by encores to sing more—in many instances double the numbers she had agreed to give by her program, was sometimes oppressive in a very great degree. Her generous nature would not allow her to deny her patrons anything, whether just or unjust. The consequence was she felt constrained to sing many times when she really did not have strength to go through with the advertised program. This constant demand made upon her by the public wherever she went, soon began to tell on her strength. Nilsson was more careful of herself in

## LITTA

this respect. On one occasion when it was evident from the expression on her face she was suffering from ill-health, and when encored she made no appearance. The call grew louder and still more imperative. At last she came back on the stage with an unmistakable expression of anger on her countenance, and waiving her hand towards the audience with much positiveness she withdrew from the stage without singing again in answer to the encore. That was just and right. "The demand made by the public upon famous singers for so much more than they contracted to give or the public had paid for, is unjust in the extreme. No lawyer is expected to try two cases for his client for the same fee he agreed to try one. A lecturer, when he has agreed to give one lecture, is

## CONCERT TOURS

not expected to give another lecture, or even to repeat the same one without additional compensation. Encores are all right enough, but the singer ought to be allowed the privilege to sing or not. Demands for a repetition of every number is in ill taste. Litta was called many times to sing more than the program contained, when it was apparent upon her every feature that her strength was rapidly being exhausted. Had they known what suffering they were inflicting upon this good and ever generous child of song, surely the public would have lain no such oppressive burdens upon her.



VII.

THE GOING HOME.

“She was loved most for her pure and gentle life and so loving hands weave roses with the laurel in her chaplet of fame.”

---

“Of every tear that sorrowing mortals shed on such green graves, some good is born, some gentler nature comes.”

—*Charles Dickens.*

## THE GOING HOME.

THE remaining chapter in her beautiful life is a sad one and it will be briefly written. We tell that which is sorrowful only in few and simple words. It was probably a year before her fatal sickness, it was perceived her health was failing. But it was not until the early spring of 1883 she suffered a severe attack from which she never fully recovered. That was at Galesburg. She rallied from that attack after a brief time and resumed her work again. At Des Moines, in Iowa, she was again prostrated by sickness. After that she ought not to have attempted to continue in her work. She was never robust in health, but she had such energy as enabled her

## LITTA

to endure much severe labor. When urged by her friends to rest for a time, her reply was she did not want her manager to lose money by her failure to perform her contract with him. That was generous to her manager but not just to herself. He ought to have insisted on being as generous to her as she was to him. It is no doubt true she thought herself capable of doing more than her strength would permit. The last concert given by her company in which she participated was at Escanaba. From there she went or rather was taken to Negaunee where she had another engagement but she was unable to appear. It was then determined by her friends to take her to her own home as soon as it would be practicable. It was done. That was a sorrowful journey. The painful thought



## THE GOING HOME

came to those having the care of her that her sickness would prove to be mortal, and it was evident to friends who saw her after her arrival at home that she had sung her last song on earth. "The day goeth away, for the shadows of the evening are stretched out." It was then she fell asleep.

The announcement of her death produced a profound sadness not only among her home friends but among many thousands all over the states of this great republic who had heard the sweet tones of her voice. Nor is this all. The news of her death was heard with deepest sorrow over the sea by many friends in royal homes and in lowly dwellings. Everywhere all who had ever heard the splendid music of her voice were sad when it became known they should hear that voice no

## LITTA

more. Years have come and gone, still there are many hearts that grow sad when the recollection of the unhappy fate of one so young, so gentle, and so good comes back to them in the hours of silent musings. That scene in her mother's humble home—July 7, 1883—is too sacred to be made the subject of descriptive mention. Those grand words that had often been sung as the prayer of her soul by her whose life was then passing away in the stillness of that room—

“Rock of ages cleft for me  
Let me hide myself in thee,”

was then about to find its fruition in the home of the good and the true in that “house not made with hands—eternal in the heavens.”

The friends of Litta came together at the hour appointed for the funeral

## THE GOING HOME

services. It was an assembling of all classes of people, rich and poor, to pay homage to her worth. The ceremonies were brief but impressive. The minister prayed and the people wept. Then her body was borne away and laid among flowers in the tomb. That was the end of a noble life here on earth. Friends came together again and took her body from the tomb and buried it in our mother earth, there to remain until the morning of the resurrection when angels will come to bear it away to Our Father's House. Once more, and for the last time, her friends came together. It was around that column that rises above her grave in the midst of the great forest trees in the peaceful city of the dead. They had come to dedicate that monument as an enduring evidence of the affec-

## LITTA

tion they had for her when living and to hallow her memory in their hearts.

The friends were loath to leave that sacred spot. Hope was kindled in all hearts by singing in tenderest notes:

“O, Morning Land.”

And also by the singing of those beautiful words:

“Angels ever bright and fair,  
Take, O take me, to your care,”

words that Litta had herself often sung with tenderest and sweetest voice. One standing by that grave on that day sang in soft and low accents:

“There is a blessed home beyond this  
land of woe,”

with such tenderness as touched every heart. Finally her worth as a woman, her greatness as an artist, and her achievements in life were exalted in eloquent words. Then the people went away.

VIII.

PERSONAL WORTH.

.

“To Litta the woman first, whose virtue shines out with luster on her sex and to Litta the artist second, whose eminence is our local legacy, we are here to offer the tribute of our respect, of our admiration, and of our affection.”

—*David Davis.*

•

## PERSONAL WORTH.

**S**TUDYING briefly the character of Litta it will be seen it contained only that which is best in social worth. That which made her most beloved was not her life on the lyric stage, great as that was, but her pure personal life without the slightest blemish. It was a life so true it commanded the highest respect and even the affection of the lowly and the exalted. Often the poor, who loved her for her gentle qualities, pause at the foot of the monument that marks her grave and with dimmed eyes read the inscriptions to her personal worth that are cut deep in that solid granite. May that unpretentious monument stand through all coming centuries! It will make every

## LITTA

one who reads those imperishable words appreciate more than ever the good that is in our common humanity. Litta had herself been poor during her whole life and that caused her to have the intensest sympathy with the lowly. The brightest gem in her crown will be her nobleness of soul. It is that which will remain when all else connected with her fame shall have perished and is forgotten. She was gentle, she was kind, and she loved all that is good and all that is good loved her. She lived to do good unto others. It was her crowning happiness to divide everything she had with others, giving always the largest share and the best to them. Nothing gave her so much pleasure as to do good to others. In that work akin to the purest ministrations in charity she literally sacrificed



## PERSONAL WORTH

her life — a life that contained all that is best in human nature. She did not have to learn to be good or do good. It was inwrought in her nature.

But distinction seldom arises out of the silent and unostentatious exercise of the graces and virtues of the best lives. There are noted philanthropists but they have become so by doing generous acts before the public, in the hospital, the prison, and in the charitable institutions. That is praiseworthy. But the name of one who silently and unobserved does most that is best for humanity is seldom written only by the recording angel in the Book of Life. Fame arises out of talents not commonly possessed with others. Such gifts when exercised before the public attract attention. Instances of rare endowments are manifested in oratory,

## LITTA

in music, in painting, in sculpture, and most often in merciless war, and the ones having those extraordinary powers become famous. It was through her voice of wonderful compass and thrilling power that Litta became known to the musical world. Few ever had that gift in so large a measure. It was a 'beautiful gift of nature' and one that is appreciated by all people in all lands no matter what their degree of civilization may be. It was inevitable a voice capable of such wondrous expression in song would make her famous and so it did. There is a strange power in the human voice and whether heard in speech or song it has always a charm which nothing else possesses. Its extent and power was never better observed than in hearing Litta sing before a vast multitude as-

## PERSONAL WORTH

sembled from motives of patriotism. Orators—strong men—with unusually clear and strong voices addressed the people. Beyond a few that surrounded the stand they were not heard. Any one standing on the outskirts of the assembled mass of people—many thousands—could see the motion of their hands and bodies that evidenced the fact they were speaking, but not a word was understood. After they had ceased to speak, Litta was introduced to sing. She was yet small of stature, but graceful in form—still not much more than a child in age. The first word she uttered went beyond and over that immense assembly and in an instant profound silence prevailed. Every word she pronounced was distinctly understood by every one. As her clear notes rang out—

## LITTA

“God save our native land,  
Firm may she ever stand,”

ten thousand hearts silently responded with patriotic fervor, Amen! When she sang “The Star Spangled Banner” all Americans that heard her, resolved to observe a stronger devotion to our common country. When she sang on other occasions “I Know That My Redeemer Liveth,” there was no heart upon which its grand measures fell but was strengthened in its devotion to the great Master and to His beautiful and holy teachings and was not better grounded in its hope of immortality. When she sang, as she often did, those beautiful words so full of tenderest pathos:

“Home, home, sweet, sweet home,  
There is no place like home,”

thousands gave thanks to Our Father

## PERSONAL WORTH

for their own homes "ever so humble." She sang of patriotism and citizens became better and more devoted to our beloved country. She sang of religion and devotion was kindled anew and a deeper and firmer conviction of its divine truths came to the believer than ever before. She sang of "The old folks at home," and of that mother that made it a home and all the better impulses of our natures were enlarged and all who heard her sweet accents resolved to be better and do more good to others.

Her life ended prematurely, yet she lived long enough to make a splendid reputation for herself both in Europe and in America. Heroic in spirit and brave in achievements she accomplished in the space of a few years that which is commonly the work of a

## LITTA

long lifetime. She was subjected sometimes to unfriendly criticism, no doubt, but a triumph—a grand triumph, came at last. In the gilded halls of the great and in the lowly dwellings of the poor on both continents she made herself heard and all were charmed with the surpassing sweetness of her voice and acknowledged the supremacy of her genius. Like Jenny Lind she often sang for the benefit of the poor, because her heart was good and she loved to do good unto them. Jenny Lind's last singing on the American continent, after her marriage in Boston and just before starting homeward, was in a town hall in a New England village where she had been stopping temporarily — not suffering any public announcement to be made that she would sing for public charity, yet she

## PERSONAL WORTH

did devote the whole proceeds received to that noble work. That was like her for her life abounded in all that is good. The great in soul are always kind and gentle in spirit. Litta's voice was heard for the last time in earthly song far up in the Peninsula of Northern Michigan, near the Great Lakes among the poor miners of that vicinity. No one can tell what hopes were kindled, what emotions and what resolves, and what purposes for good were awakened among that lowly people by her song. Litta! Child of song, thy pure and true life will ever be an inspiration to all who love the good to work more and do more in mercy and in charity and in all that makes the world better.





IX.

In Memoriam.

---

Marie Eugenia von Elsner.

“This name needed not to be engraved  
on stone, for it had been printed forever  
on some fond heart.”

— *John Watson.*





## IN MEMORIAM

On the south side of the column that rises above her grave, where all who pass that way may read it, is written in the granite, the story of her life :

“MARIE EUGENIA VON ELSNER

WAS BORN JUNE 1, 1856,

AND DIED JULY 7, 1888.

SHE WAS KNOWN TO THE MUSICAL WORLD

AS

MARIE LITTA.”

## IN MEMORIAM

On the west side, on which falls the last rays of the going down sun, gilding the letters as with gold, is the record of the tribute of the citizens to her memory:

“ THIS MONUMENT  
WAS ERECTED  
BY THE CITIZENS OF BLOOMINGTON  
TO THE MEMORY  
OF HER WHO WON FAME FOR  
HERSELF  
AND REFLECTED IT UPON  
THE CITY  
OF HER BIRTH.”

## IN MEMORIAM

In the shadow of the column on the north, where no sun-light ever falls other than that of the evening and morning sun, are engraved words of tender pathos;

“HER SUN ROSE THROUGH CLOUDS IN THE MORNING AND WAS ECLIPSED AT NOON. BY A LIFE LABORIOUS AND HEROIC, HER GIRLHOOD WITNESSED THE TRIUMPH OF HER GENIUS. WELCOME TO THE RANKS OF THE GREAT ARTISTS OF HER TIME. SHE WAS LOVED MOST FOR HER PURE AND GENTLE LIFE, AND SO LOVING HANDS WEAVE ROSES WITH THE LAUREL IN HER CHAPLET OF FAME.”

## IN MEMORIAM

On the east side, where fall lights and shadows of early morning, are words the reading of which cause emotions of sorrow and hope; sorrow, her years were so few, and hope that her gentle life will ever be a continuing benediction:

“ A FLOWER IS DEAD. A STAR IS FALLEN. A BIRD, SINGING THE HIGHEST AND RAREST MELODY, HAS GONE FOREVER FROM THE GROVES OF TIME. A WOMAN, SPLENDID AND HEROIC IN ALL THE BETTER QUALITIES OF LIFE, HAS CLOSED HER EYES IN DEATH, AND A VOICE WHICH CAUGHT THE HIGHEST SYMPHONIES OF NATURE, HAS JOINED IN THE CHORUS OF THE INFINITE.

“ ‘ OF EVERY TEAR THAT SORROWING MORTALS SHED ON SUCH GREEN GRAVES, SOME GOOD IS BORN, SOME GENTLER NATURE COMES.’ ”





ML  
420  
E49

THE LIBRARY  
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA  
Santa Barbara

THIS BOOK IS DUE ON THE LAST DATE  
STAMPED BELOW.

CIRC. AFTER JUN 10 1975

UC SOUTHERN REGIONAL LIBRARY FACILITY



**A** 000 632 803 3

